



## Maryland Department of Disabilities - Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **MDOD announces \$2.6 million in new grant funding for program assisting individuals with disabilities**

ANNAPOLIS, MD (December 9, 2005) - The **Maryland Department of Disabilities** announced Wednesday a **unique public-private partnership**, resulting in **\$2.6 million** in new grants to fund the Assistive Technology Guaranteed Loan Program for the next 17 years. The Loan Program, established in 1999, has assisted nearly 500 individuals with disabilities to achieve diverse goals - from leaving institutions to live independently in the community to starting their own businesses.

The \$2.6 million grant is a combination of funds from the U.S. Department of Education, which contributed \$2.1 million, four private foundations, two private business and two state agencies.

**“The awarding of this grant represents the absolute best with regard to public-private partnerships. It shows what can be accomplished when everyone pitches in for a worthy cause,”** said **Kristen Cox, Secretary of the Maryland Department of Disabilities**. **“This is a program that has helped people in such a meaningful way but was in jeopardy for lack of continued funding. We wanted to capitalize on federal dollars that were available, but needed to raise \$520,000 ourselves to qualify. Everyone rolled up their sleeves and got the job done.”**

The **program provides low-interest loans to help Marylanders with disabilities** and their families buy disability-related devices like vans with wheelchair lifts, computers, wheelchair ramps, and hearing and vision aids. Some of the grant funding will be used to create a new component specifically to help people with disabilities buy equipment to start home-based businesses or to telecommute.

**“Many of the people who have secured loans through this program would not have been able to afford the technology they need without this resource,”** commented Aris Melissaratos, Secretary of the Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development, who attended a reception in Annapolis to announce the new grants. **“In Maryland, we are currently enjoying such a marvelous economy -- we need to find ways to include every member of our society. This program offers a way to do that, helping people get the technology and adaptive devices they need to work and even to start their own businesses.”**

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Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr., Governor ~ Michael S. Steele, Lt. Governor  
Kristen Cox, Secretary ~ Diane McComb, Deputy Secretary

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Michael Bullis, who is blind, purchased a global positioning system and an upgraded BrailleNote, a PDA for people who are blind, with a loan he obtained through the program. He was leery about seeking help through a governmental program, but soon understood how valuable a resource the program is for people who would otherwise be unable to afford the technology. “Sometimes government does need to go that extra mile for people simply because of the love of the outcome,” said Bullis, who has since started his own personnel recruitment company with numerous sales people who are also blind.

Karenna and Ken Jones turned to the Assistive Technology Guaranteed Loan Program to obtain a loan to modify their home and to buy a van with a wheelchair lift after their son, who was then just two years old, was severely injured in an accident.

“In a twink of an eye, everything can change,” said Ms. Jones. “When your child is hurt, you don’t think about jobs, you don’t think about the mortgage, or how to pay the bills.” She took a year off from her job while her son was in hospitals in Baltimore -- 130 miles away from their home in Salisbury. “I couldn’t bring my son home because our home was not accessible,” she explained. “Through the ATGLP, we were able to get the money to modify our home and bring him home.”

Private foundations contributing to the effort include: the **Harry and Jeannette Weinberg Foundation**, the **J. Willard and Alice S. Marriot Foundation**, the **Herbert Bearman Foundation** and the **Elizabeth Streb Peroutka Foundation**. The **Ride-Away Corp.**, which sells modified vehicles to people with disabilities, and the **State Employees Credit Union**, which participates in the program as a lender, also contributed to the matching grant. The **Maryland Department of Disabilities** and **Maryland Division of Rehabilitation Services** added the remaining funds.

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